



## **Opening Statement**

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### **Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Susan W. Brooks (R-IN) Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications Committee on Homeland Security**

#### **“Interoperable Communications: Assessing Progress Since 9/11”**

#### **Remarks as Prepared**

I first want to thank our witnesses for their flexibility in the scheduling of this hearing. We had originally planned to hold it in September, but had to postpone it due to a joint session of Congress with the President of Ukraine. I appreciate you working with me and my staff to reschedule this important hearing today.

As you well know, the 9/11 Commission report examined the communications failures first responders experienced at the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania and recommended the allocation of radio spectrum to public safety for the creation of an interoperable public safety communications network. Unfortunately, communications challenges persisted during Hurricane Katrina.

Much has changed since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina exposed significant gaps in communications capabilities.

Congress established the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) in the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act to coordinate Federal interoperable communications programs and conduct outreach to support emergency response providers.

OEC has worked with States on the development of Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans and in 2008 issued the first National Emergency Communications Plan, which included goals for achieving communications capabilities at the state and local levels.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Grant Programs Directorate reports that states and localities have invested more than \$5 billion in preparedness grant funding to enhance their

communications capabilities. These grants have been used for planning, training, exercises, equipment, and to fund Statewide Interoperability Coordinator positions.

Congress finally addressed the 9/11 Commission's recommendation to allocate the D Block to public safety with the passage of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, establishing the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). This was long overdue, as I discussed with former 9/11 Commission Chairman Tom Kean (pronounced Kane) at a hearing the Committee on Homeland Security held earlier this year on the 10-year anniversary of the release of their report.

These are all important steps. But we know that challenges remain and more work must be done.

Despite all these programs and investments, interoperable communications continues to be a challenge during disaster response, as evidenced during the response to Hurricane Sandy and the Navy Yard shooting. We must continue to work to ensure first responders have the tools they need to communicate.

I am pleased that, at the urging of myself and Ranking Member Payne, last week OEC released an updated National Emergency Communications Plan that takes into account the changes in technology since the first plan. I am looking forward to hearing from Admiral Hewitt about this new plan, the outreach he conducted with stakeholders during the plan's development, and upcoming efforts to implement the plan's five goals.

I am also looking forward to hearing more about FirstNet's efforts to engage with states on the development of the nationwide public safety broadband network. This is a huge undertaking and I am interested in learning about the progress to date and the plans for the future.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today as we collaboratively work together to ensure our nation's first responders have the tools they need to communicate both in their daily service and when disaster strikes.

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